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GOD'S JUDGMENTS FOR NATIONAL SINS.

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IT is said, in the Word of God, that when his judgments are abroad in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness. Let us consider whether those judgments are abroad among us for our sins, and if so, what they are, and how many and how heavy, for God suits his judgments to our sins—indeed, makes our sins both the punishment and the plague of our life. We are, as a people, under a heavy hand. The principal feature of these judgments is, that we have been left to ourselves: we have been left to be filled with the fruit of our own doings. They are not the judgments of famine or pestilence or earthquake, the invisible and wasting scourges which go over the earth decimating and destroying by a law too subtle for our tracing and too secret for our penetration. But they proceed from the shock and collision of human agencies, directed and impelled by the conflicting passions which lie behind them. They stand before us in all the woes and horrors of a bitter, protracted, desolating civil war. From the forum of peaceful discussion and republican suffrage the controversy has been carried to the last resource of physical force—violence and blood. And this has been done under circumstances and with concomitants of evil such as to affect the whole mind and heart of the nation with every form of affliction and mental distress. Upon the more open and tangible effects of such a civil war as this, in its bearing upon the disruption of business, the destruction of property, and even the loss of human life, it is not my purpose to dwell. The shock thus given to the country, the disorder it produces, the derangement and uncertainty it occasions, the burdens it imposes, and the fortunes it destroys, are all matters with which the people of this country are but too sadly familiar. And yet, even in these things, through all the region of the adhering—with the exception of the border States—these judgments of God have thus far been tempered with singu-

lar mercy, and have, on the general scale, been marvelously mitigated. Indeed, so far in the controversy, it is to be feared that the people inhabiting these sections of the Republic, from their comparative exemption from the storm, do not even yet take to heart the awful nature of the judgments now smiting the land, nor comprehend the extent and depth of their complicity in the sins which have culminated in this fury. I make all allowance, indeed, for what they have done and borne and suffered; but when it is all subtracted, the present thrift and drift and appearance and action and condition of the people in all those regions constitute a ground of wonder and amazement at the long suffering and tender mercy of our God.

It is, indeed, upon the people of the border States, and throughout the region where the sway of the Rebellion is still rigid and unbroken, that the woes and miseries of this tempest have hitherto been falling heaviest. And when we do but try to conceive the depth of the sorrow of the true and faithful people in those regions, and to contemplate even one tithe of what they have suffered in their most keen and sacred sensibilities, no power of words can express fully the nature and extent of their wretchedness. The disruption of business associations, the separation of families, the social ostracism, the fearful alienations of human hearts, the cruelties perpetrated, the scenes of persecution, the grinding heel of despotism, the awful profanity and jocularity of Death in his murderous round—surely, nothing in the horrors of the French Revolution can be said to have transcended the woes and persecutions of men, women, and children, whose only provocation to their tormentors is their unchanging love and devotion for the Union and the Government of their fathers. The same spirit—though in a form as yet modified and restrained—we have witnessed and felt here in the very Capital of the country.

The lines of division have run right through old and long-established friendships, have sundered pastors and people, have made a man's foes even those of his own household, and have engendered the bitterness and fostered the prejudices that ever walk forth as the premonitory specters of social and ecclesiastical dissolution; so that the question is no longer a mere question of party politics or preference for a candidate, or a question of some measure of sectional or local policy, but it is a question of fundamental character, a question of human right and duty, a question of human con-

science, a question of life or death of a mighty nation; and along with this there are questions of the most amazing and appalling complication and difficulty, all arising from the confusion and variety of public sentiment, and from the moral obliquity and perversion of the national mind and heart. The very things which now strain and try this nation are traceable to the sins of the nation. It is not ignorance that is trying us now, but willful, wanton blindness, unreasoning selfishness, and the practical atheism of the people, from which all the outgrowth springs of all our follies and errors, our crimes and sins and miseries—passion and prejudice, mutual jealousy, suspicion, lust for power, attended by all the arts of the demagogue, by the reeking venality and unblushing wickedness of the public press. These are the real judgments which now lie upon the land—which now confuse and bewilder those who would be honest, who desire to be true, who want nothing in this controversy but what is right, but what is in accordance with the will and law of God, and who would gladly do what they may to establish the institutions of the Government upon a sure foundation of public righteousness—who feel it is no time for sophistries and technicalities, for quibbles and formalities, but who go for the substance of doctrines, the eternal righteousness of God, in all the relations of man to his fellow-man, as well as of men to God. And because we are confounded in these things, and do not even yet know whether a lie is in our right hand, we are still groping and stumbling in the dark mountain of sin and shame, our eyes blinded, our ears heavy, our hearts hardened, and our hands paralyzed. We are as a nation in a stupor, feeling the sharp sting of God's goads spurring us out of our swoon, but yet drowsy and but little awake.

And now we have no right to shut our eyes to the sins which form the ground of indictment against us. We are guilty if we attempt to do this, guilty in the attempted concealment, and we are really the more culpable if we undertake to blink or flinch from the full acknowledgment and recognition of any one of the sins of which we, as individuals or communities, or as a nation, have been guilty in the sight of Heaven. But where shall we begin the catalogue of these iniquities? It is even difficult to classify and document them, so manifold and variant, with a language more copious in terms that signify human delinquencies than it is even in those referring to any other subject whatever; we should yet exhaust our mother tongue long before we could express the full tale of human iniquity and

transgression. Private sins and public sins, secret sins and open sins, personal sins and social sins, sins of the heart and sins of the life, sins in the family and sins in the Church, sins in business life, sins in fashionable life, sins of the flesh and sins of the spirit, sins of omission and sins of commission, sins of ignorance and sins of wantonness, sins of civil and sins of official life, sins political and sins ecclesiastical.

But we must be more specific, and at the same time more general, if possible, in considering what have been the moral and spiritual causes that have led us so far astray from the paths of rectitude, and so deeply in the courses of corruption and dishonor. All sin is fiery, and eats as doth a canker. It riddles out the very basis of moral character in man; it frets and wears away the warp and woof of the confidences and securities of human life. It is the moral *azote*. Nothing of spiritual purity can live in its presence. Under its impulse and dominion men have their lusts excited, their passions inflamed, their understandings darkened, their consciences seared, and their hearts hardened. So prepared, they enter upon life, and in the choice of avocations, of associations, of aims, and of means to those aims, they are constantly exposed to powerful temptations, which break down all moral restraint, and send them on in a career of immorality, impiety, and dishonesty, which not only proves their own ruin, but seriously tends to injure and corrupt all with whom they come in contact. Out of all this mass of human iniquity, certain cardinal forms of human sin and profligacy appear.

In defining national offenses, each man must pursue his own method and make his own distinctions. I am not disposed to be over nice and careful in adhering strictly to the technical points of the political phraseology of the day. I shall consider those sins national which are known as open, public, or general, whether in a form organized or unorganized. I shall consider those as national sins which involve the great majority of the people in their practice, their motive, or their sympathy. On the subject of private and personal sins, which are to be confessed and repaired in a manner corresponding to their nature, I need not now undertake, as it would be manifestly impossible to dwell, any further than to say, that the whole aggregate of them, no doubt, furnish one serious and solemn reason for the private and public afflictions that are resting on all the land. But there are some general and positive forms of sin which it would, in my judgment, be the sheerest hypocrisy to overlook.

I. And the first I mention is the practical rejection of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, by vast numbers of the people, though it has been proclaimed to them over and over again. This is so general that it amounts, in my estimation, to a national sin of the deepest dye. It is tantamount to a charge of irreligion, impiety, and atheism, and is the sin for which every man who stands in it is now arraigned before God. This is their condemnation, that light has come into the world and men have chosen darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil. He that believeth not in Christ is condemned already. I believe in my soul that God is angry with this nation, and is now bringing us into judgment because we have so many of us failed to confess Jesus Christ before men and to receive his spiritual kingdom into our hearts, with all its laws, agencies, influences, and effects. And I put this first and foremost, because it is a practical denial of God in the kingdom of his grace, and in the last means and methods he ever designs to employ for the recovery and salvation of mankind. It is, in effect, utterly ignoring his prerogative, despising his authority, and setting at naught his very mercy and compassion. It is the deepest insult and the foulest dishonor we can ever pay to him; because, under the present dispensation, it prepares the way for every other indignity in the catalogue of human guilt.

II. Again, I mention idolatry as a cardinal sin of which we have, in many forms, been guilty. It follows, that, if men who must have some object of supreme desire to which they pay supreme devotion, will not have God for their object, they will virtually dethrone him in their hearts and establish there some idol of the age of a Christian civilization. We have all had gods of one kind or other before the Lord God Jehovah, and have worshiped our idol, whatever it be, without regard to the claims, the commandments, or the statutes of the one only true and ever-living God. I believe that he is angry with us for this, and that his indignation is now smoking against us and against all our idol deities that we have cherished in the land.

III. Again, I mention the general neglect and violation of God's ordinances, the Sabbath and the sanctuary, and the profanation of his name. The whole air is loaded with a foul-mouthed profanity; and, in fact, all this is accompanied by a degree of levity, vulgarity, and vanity, that are well-nigh as universal as appalling. Men who profess to be loyal to their country, openly and shamelessly

trample on the Sabbath, and provoke Him to anger who has said: "I will not hold him guiltless that taketh my name in vain." I believe God is angry with us for this, and that his anger smokes and will smoke at the profane and impious race of men who treat the whole subject of Christianity, with its requirements and restraints, as a mere story, an idle song, and conduct in regard to it as if it were only a figment or fiction of the past.

IV. Again, I mention the general corruption of manners and morals which is manifest in vice and dissipation, in excess and extravagance and intemperance, everywhere—in the highest circles of fashion, in the lowest depths of infamy—and all this fostered and catered to by the bold and reckless corruptors of society, while the well-nigh total failure to correct, restrain, or extinguish the public profligacy of the times, either by family or primary instruction, by a Christian or public sentiment, by the laws of the land, or through the officers of the Government itself—is a delinquency so great as to enhance our criminality and increase the evils of our condition a thousandfold. There is no doubt but we are suffering from these evils in all the ramifications of human society; and, in this respect, if God's wrath be not turned away by timely repentance, we must share the fate of every other people whose very luxuries and licenses have enervated them and finally destroyed them.

V. I mention, again, the spirit of cruelty and oppression which has marked the white race of America toward the Indian and the African. When the chapter of our usurpations and perfidies toward the aborigines of this country shall be fully disclosed, we shall find, I greatly fear, that, notwithstanding the treacherous and savage dispositions of the barbarians, the refinements of infamy which the dominant race have practiced upon them are not less repugnant to truth and justice, or heinous in the sight of God. And then, as to the evils and wrongs of human bondage. When I come to speak on this subject, I am well aware that I touch the sensitive nerves—the sore spot—of this whole nation. And yet, though I should encounter the settled convictions and prejudices of every man in the nation, I feel that I should not have performed my whole duty this day without plainly setting before you my estimate of the subject as it appears to me in the present light; and when I have done this as briefly as possible, I shall feel that I have finished my testimony in respect to this question, by exhausting, so far as I am able, the obligations that rest upon me.

First, then, I believe that the system of slavery, as it has existed in our country, when viewed only in the light of the consequences that have followed it, has been an evil and a curse of the most appalling magnitude and enormity. To say nothing of its incidental and inherent wrongs upon the African race, it has been the apple of discord among the ruling race, that has wrought more dissension, more animosity, and more lasting bitterness, than any one or all other causes combined, since the foundation of the Government. The traces of this evil are in the Federal Constitution, legislation, and history of the country; but the spirit of the evil lies back of all written or documentary instruments, in the unsanctified mind and heart and passion of man—lies in commercial cupidity and ambition for political aristocracy and power. And, therefore, I do not believe that any one portion of the people in any one section of the land are alone to be blamed or held accountable for whatever of sin or suffering this system may have entailed upon us. Since the war broke out, and the great events of its progress thus far have transpired, I am disposed to stand equally amazed at the proofs of human insincerity on the one hand, and the claims of Divine authority on the other. I am constrained to censure the injustice of the laws of exclusion against this outcast portion of God's human creatures, and to denounce the cruel, preposterous, and inexorable prejudice in which those laws are founded. I believe, in short, that the all-seeing eye of God beholds a degree of selfishness, hypocrisy, inconsistency, and false philanthropy upon this subject, which positively amounts to the infatuation and frenzy of judicial blindness among all the people, East and West, North and South, and which, of itself, would be sufficient to sink the whole nation into the nethermost pit of perdition. And after long years of angry and embittered controversy, in which men have not known the manner of spirit they were of, this great, fearful, complicated mass of guilt and misery—this awful nightmare and incubus which was lying across the very vitals of the nation, which no skill or foresight of human wisdom could remedy or relieve—has been thrown into the mighty scales of civil war, and the sword of God is unsheathed to cut the knot of this more than Gordian mystery, and to rip from the heart of the nation the disguises that have hidden our own real condition from our eyes, and to solve, in unanticipated ways, and by means we never could have foreseen, the questions connected with this subject, which have hitherto been both our torment and our shame. I believe that the

time had come when nothing but war was left to open our eyes to our own true moral state in the sight of God, and to educate the mind and the heart of the nation to a new platform of doctrine, sentiment, and opinion on this as well as on every other great interest of mankind, in the advancing day of a Christian civilization. I believe it is the design of God that the system of African slavery shall pass away, and that the true era of its decline was struck when the first gun of the rebellion made its booming salutation to the brave Anderson and his little band under the casemates at Sumter.

VI. And now, once more, I mention another crying and crushing sin that we have to lament and deplore to-day—the sin of secession and rebellion against the Government of the United States, and the connivance of secret sympathizers and abettors. I regard this as a high crime against God and man—not a mere mistake or misfortune—save where men and women are compelled or constrained to act in the character of traitors and rebels by the despotic mandate of the arch-conspirators against the integrity, the peace, and safety of the commonwealth. That there was a foul and shameful conspiracy, attended by the insolence and ferocity of fiends in human shape, first to assassinate the President-elect on his way to the Capital, and afterward to seize the city, and murder Union men, women, and children, there is not the slightest doubt. And if the secret history of the plots of these men could come to light, it would, no doubt, startle the whole nation with the horrors of these contemplated atrocities; and if we look at the persecution and distress inflicted on the innocent wherever the ruthless perjurers have been able to hold their sway, we shall find, that not in all the annals of martyrdom have our heroic and faithful countrymen been transcended by examples either in the lofty spirit of their devotion or in the brutal and bloody savagery of their oppressors. And yet this Government has been unable and unwilling to afford them any relief, while it shelters and protects and feeds, with a most criminal indulgence, the secret enemies of its existence, who live beneath the very shadow of the Capitol, detesting it in its magnanimity, and applauding the open treason with which an armed front is clutching at its very throat. Amazed at such a state of things, I sometimes wonder what posterity will think, in the clear light of a coming day—which, I pray, may succeed the darkness of the present night—in contemplation of the subtlety and the depth of the treachery that pervades every nook and cor-

ner: and whether they will be more astonished at the madness of disloyalty in its perversion of the plainest principle of common honesty and duty, or at the toleration and clemency of a Government which, after two years of suffering, disaster, and humiliation, still fails not to cherish in its bosom this nest of vipers. Nor am I constrained to speak thus of a portion of our community from any spirit or desire of personal violence or capital retribution but such as the necessities of the general safety and of self-preservation imperatively demand. I only feel that the community ought to be cleared of the spirit of disloyalty, by a division of those whose hearts are with the South in this rebellion from those whose hearts are with the Government up to the full standard of Scriptural obedience. This is the only way that I know of in which we can repent of and forsake the sin of sedition and revolt.

Those who feel at heart no allegiance to the Government should be put beyond the lines, at least. That is the gentlest visitation that the authorities can lawfully bestow: for this is no question of party politics, and I deny the impeachment of it in the most emphatic terms. It is purely a question of religious duty, which we owe to God and our country. And if we mean to forsake our sins; if we mean to put away from among us the abominable thing; if we mean to return unto God with all our hearts, we must recur to the law of the Bible: "If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out; if thine hand offend thee, cut it off." May we have before us, in this passage from the prophet, the true solution of the issues that are pending.

Now, when the ship of state, freighted as it is with all our memories and all our hopes, lies tossing in the tempest; when it is no longer a question of policy or preference, as between rival parties and candidates in time of peace, but a deeper, broader, more vital question of the triumph of the Government and the *conscience* of the American people over a system of usurpation and despotism, sustained by an organized and armed rebellion against them—now, when a fierce and bloody attempt is made to undermine the very foundations of social order, and to pull down the noblest structure of empire the sun has ever shone upon, and to sunder a land that was once most happy in all the arts and industries of advancing civilization, and to blot out from the face of the globe the unity of a mighty nation, and to impair forever the greatness and the usefulness of a people among whom the divine principles and precepts of Christianity itself have had their freest and their noblest

scope—would it not be thought a thing incredible that the Christian people and the Christian ministry of this land should stand aloof, should manifest a deep and profound indifference, should undertake to live and act and preach and think and feel as though there was no war and no judgment of God among us whatever? And all this, too, while the whole history of the nation, hitherto, has been marked by one continued succession of providential interpositions for deliverance—one constant series of examples of the presence and influence of the Christian element working out our national destiny. Without Christianity the story of America never could have been told. Those manifold and mighty monuments which cover the land could never have been reared. None but God can see the effects of Christian prayer and fidelity in the testimony of Christian truth upon the fortunes of this nation. And now, in such a land, with such a record and such a prospect, and in such a condition, when we feel and know that blows are being struck which, if not repelled, must not only destroy our civil heritage, but also roll back the chariot of human salvation for a thousand years—can the disciples and ministers of this religion, which has, more than all other things, made the land a blessing, be excused from the duties and trials which now rest upon the nation? Nay, do you not look to the Christian sentiment and opinion of this country for continuance and support? Do you not rely on the loyalty and the prayers of the Christian people of this country, as constituting, under God, the firmest and most unwavering prop and pillar of the nation's strength? If this be so, then I declare, in the name of the Christian Church, and of all that follow the great Head of the Church in this land, that, as they have never heretofore been found wanting in the hour of their country's need, so they will not now be found wanting. For when it comes to this, the old religion, which has, for eighteen hundred years, produced the heroes and martyrs of the world, will rise again, and lead her mighty processions into the thickest of the contest. And not till the Church of Christ has been utterly overthrown, and not until her prayer goes out, and her last soul is offered upon the altar of expiring liberty, will it be time for men to say: "There is no longer any hope;" and not until then can the cause of human nature everywhere be ruined. And for this reason it is, that, in the name of the Church, we lift up our voices, "cry aloud and spare not," showing the people their sins and transgressions. The Christian mind of this nation beholds the

spectacle we now present with a feeling of the deepest solemnity and the most painful suspense. The Christian mind of this nation interprets the afflictions and our sufferings now as the judgments of God for our moral obliquity. It holds that there is a righteousness which exalteth a nation, while sin is a reproach to any people. It holds that, in a crisis like this, there is but one inspiration that can carry us through in triumph, and that is the inspiration of the Almighty. It holds that among the first signs of the presence of such an inspiration is the general return of the people to sobriety and virtue; and, therefore, it views, with pain and grief, with apprehension and alarm, the almost universal reign of vice, vulgarity, and impiety. And because the nation has been so long blinded and indifferent to the principles of truth, and so long disobedient to the authority of God, he has not only kindled the fire of this furnace, but he is adding fuel to the flames, and holding us in them, that we may be either purified or consumed. That is the issue now before us—purification or destruction. It is comparatively of little account what may be the tidings from the great sieges or the battle-fields of our forces, what may be the conditions of the currency, or the result of local elections, or, indeed, what may be the daily contingencies or details that fall out to us in the history of this great time; but the true question is, Whether, amid all these millions of human beings, a sufficient number may be found upon whom the inspiration of the Almighty has descended to render it consistent with his most gracious purpose, and with the character of his supreme government over men, to interpose and give us the victory? If this point in the moral and religious condition of the American people can be attained, then we have no fear for the remainder. The same power that delivered the people of the Hebrew nation with a high hand and a stretched-out arm; the same power that shielded the people of the Netherlands against the combined attack of the greatest potentates of the time in Europe; the same power that brought our fathers through the bloody baptism of the Revolution, and gave to them to bequeath to us, their children, this glorious inheritance, will thunder for us along our lines of battle, and put our enemies to rout and confusion forever.

I have this faith, then, in the overruling providence of God; and so believing, let me implore my fellow-countrymen to pause and consider how we may best serve our country and our Christ in this time of their need, for a bitter curse fell upon Meroz because she

came not up to the help of the Lord against the mighty: and I honestly believe that a deep and bitter curse will fall upon that man, that family, that community, that Church, that will now draw back from following the Lord in the pathway of his present providence over this nation. How, then, can you serve America in this hour of wrath? Men, women, and children, young men, old men, all men, he is the truest patriot, the best lover of his country, the wisest and most efficient friend and helper, who is the most consistent, earnest, and prayerful Christian. If you would serve the cause of your country, cease to do evil, and learn to do well; let the wicked forsake his ways and the unrighteous man his thoughts. If you have received a bribe, restore it. If you have profaned the name of God, abandon it. If you have trampled on the Sabbath-day, trample on it no more. If one has been an infidel, a debaucher, an inebriate; if one has acted dishonestly, suppressed the truth, corrupted others, defrauded men of their rights, do it no more. O, become a true man once again; abandon every vice and every iniquity; be a man sobered and chastened by the great realities and severities of the times—a man no longer for the levity and vain dalliance of the past, but full of the mighty thoughts and stern resolves and steady purposes of present duty. We can not any longer trifle before God. These are days of sacrifice, the days of heroic suffering, the days of many and most noble martyrdoms.

Let us look defeat, disaster, and even death, if need be, steadily and calmly in the face, and, grasping the pillars of God's eternal truth and justice, and holding up our country and all its interests before his throne, let us entreat him to turn us from our transgressions, that iniquity may not be our ruin. The host of God, bearing the ark of our sacred institutions, and moving, the standard of a mighty people, in this last exodus of civil and religious liberty, is now already on its march. The trumpets of Providence have summoned the millions of our country to its peril and its toil. The pillar of fire by night, and of cloud by day, is moving before us. We are standing face to face with God, while his majesty fills our hearts with awe. May his mercy arm us with strength to live and labor, to watch and pray, to suffer and die for our native country and for the kingdom of Jesus. O, walk softly, all ye people, walk softly, for God is among us, and the Searcher of hearts is trying us as the gold is tried.